

The Snowballed Grizzly

By Henry Gallup Paine

Drawings by Frank Verbeck



"The Procedure Worked Beautifully in Theory; but Was Sometimes Defective in Practice."

SPEAKING of avalanches," remarked Major Gaspé, apropos of nothing at all, "reminds me of a curious and disastrous adventure of mine a few years ago in the Canadian Rockies.

"Engaged in gathering material for my great work, 'The Fauna of Five Continents,' I had been hunting and exploring in the Kootenai range for many weeks, with excellent results. My sole assistant was a local guide named Syd Hinton, the best hunter and trapper and the worst practical joker I have ever met. Syd had been commissioned to procure a live grizzly bear for the Bronx Zoo, and had consented to accompany me only on condition that, in case he succeeded in trapping a suitable specimen, I should help him bring it in. Whether intentional on his part or not, this agreement certainly proved to be a joke on me huge enough to satisfy even Syd's artless elemental sense of humor.

"For Syd had unquestionably succeeded; but the bear—and he was a big fellow—had shown a singular lack of consideration in allowing himself to be captured a hundred and fifty miles from anywhere in as perverse and perpendicular a region as it has ever been my hard lot to negotiate even when unimpeded by an obstinate and peevish grizzly as a traveling companion.

"The method adopted by Syd to induce his Bearship to join our party in our return to civilization was ingenious if somewhat nerve racking. He had contrived, with uncommon daring and not without some painful souvenirs, to place round the animal's neck a stout collar, to which was attached a long and strong steel chain, fastened midway of its length to a heavy log. The loose half of the chain ended in a snaphook, by means of which Bruin was made fast to some convenient tree whenever we were not on the march.

WHEN it was time to move on, Syd would approach the bear—he always kept its appetite on a keen edge—with a succulent morsel of food, while I would sneak up in the rear and unhook the chain, on which I retained a firm grip with both hands. The bear, of course, would jump for the food, with which Syd would retreat rapidly, dangling it tantalizingly before the eyes of the hungry beast. The weight of the log, and my own applied when necessary, imposed a sufficient handicap to insure Syd's retaining the lead. When a rest became advisable or necessary, Syd would throw the meat to the bear, and while he was engaged in devouring it I would take a turn round the nearest tree with my end of the chain, snap the hook on it, and quickly retire to a safe distance.

"This procedure worked beautifully in theory; but was sometimes uncomfortably defective in practice. For instance, not infrequently the bear would get tired of chasing Syd and arbitrarily decide to turn his attention to me, which required much alertness on my part to elude him, especially if there was no tree immediately at hand to hitch up to. In that case, I would have to drop everything and run; and Syd and I would change places for awhile—but never for any longer than I could help.

"When you realize that each day, after having gone through these acrobatic and discomposing experiences, we had to go back over the trail, load our pack animals, and conduct them to our camp by another route, you will understand how thoroughly and how soon I repented of my bargain. I shall always retain the highest appreciation of Syd's ability as a trapper, whether of bears or of men.

"The delays incidental to this mode of progression prolonged our trip in the mountains

until late in the season; and I was not surprised, on waking one morning, to find myself buried beneath a thick coverlid of snow, which fortunately had ceased to fall.

"We had made our camp the evening before on the steep slope of a lofty peak that rose almost unbrokenly from base to summit with a grade of fully forty-five degrees. A shelf of not more than ten feet wide afforded just enough level space to build a fire and to deposit our belongings without having them roll away from us into the valley nearly two miles below. Above us for about half a mile the mountainside was covered with a sparse growth of timber, near the upper limits of which Syd had secured his tiresome pet for the night. There the moist snow lay deep and dazzling white. Beneath us, however, the descent was simply a tilted sheet of rock eroded to the smoothness of a polished tabletop. Here but little snow had adhered, and that little, melted by the direct rays of the rising sun, had been converted by a sudden drop of temperature into a thin, glittering glaze of ice.

"Syd's first thought was for breakfast, mine for my valuable collection of skins. Digging them out of the damp snow, I hung the larger ones to dry on the branches of the tree under which I had slept, and, clearing a space before the fire, I spread the smaller pelts about on the ground.

HAVING finished our respective tasks and the welcome meal prepared by Syd, I was on the point of going to see how our horses had fared, when my companion, who had begun to skin a magnificent black wolf I had shot the day before, suddenly stopped, his knife in midair. I saw a queer look come over his face as his glance apparently lighted on something behind me.

"Gee whizz!" he exclaimed in comical amazement. "How did that get loose?"

"Turning, expecting to see I do not know what kind of animal, my eyes fell upon the least likely animal I could have expected to see,—a man. And such a man! Clad to the last detail in a fashionable tailor's conception of the most correct attire for a hunting trip, he was picking his way daintily toward us through the drifts. He might not have seemed out of place on an English pheasant preserve; but his rig was as little appropriate for roughing it in the Rockies, as my patched and dingy corduroys, frayed sweater, and battered felt hat would have been in a London drawing room. A fancy gamebag hung from his right shoulder and flapped flatly against his left hip; while, as a finishing touch, he carried his rifle locked in a sole leather case with a handle to it like that of a portmanteau.

"Bah Jove!" he said, as his glance alighted admiringly on the splendid elk and mooseskins with perfect heads crowned with magnificently branching antlers, the tawny puma, the glorious big horn, or Rocky Mountain sheep, and the other rare pelts displayed on the tree, and then fell on the wonderful black wolf on which Syd was at work. "Bah Jove! This is a bit of luck, don't ye know! What'll you boys take for the lot?"

"Take for the lot!" echoed Syd in incredulous amazement, as if discrediting his own ears. "Take for the— Well, wouldn't that jar you? What do

you think,—that we got a bunch of this kind of cattle runnin' round in the back pasture lot, an' all we got to do, when we want one, is to go out an' make a sound like a handful of oats? Why—why, we've been two months gettin' this assortment of quadrupeds,—hunted 'em and shot 'em, too, everyone, an' that's the only way I know they can be come by in this country."

"Ah—ah—quite so," responded our visitor, fixing a monocle on his left eye and turning to me with a look that made me painfully conscious of how my trousers bagged at the knee. "Ah, the difficulty is that I arrived here a trifle too late in the season to join the party of one of my—ah—correspondents. My—ah—guides are good fellows and all that, expert mountaineers, don't ye know,—I engaged them in Switzerland,—but unfortunately not familiar with the best shooting grounds over here; and—ah—to be candid with you, I have had simply rotten luck, oh, awfully rotten, 'pon me word. Now, you lads have made a pretty fair bag, and—ah—I can't see what difference it makes to you whether you dispose of it here to me now, or wait until you get back to the—ah—settlements. In fact, I—ah—would make it distinctly to your advantage. What say you?"

"I must say no, thank you," I replied, with a cheerful smile. "My—ah—bag is not for sale."

"Now, my deah fellow," protested the stranger, "evidently you don't understand the deucedly awkward position in which I should be placed if I were to return to London without a demned beast to my gun, don't ye know."

"And it's quite impossible that you should understand the deucedly awkward position in which I should be placed if I entertained your proposition, don't ye know," I retorted.

"But—ah—just think what you could do with the money," he persisted, naming a figure so liberal that, if it had not been for my obligations to my publishers, who had financed my expedition, I should have been strongly tempted to accept it. Instead, I replied pointedly:

"It may do you good to reflect on what you can't do with the money, my good fellow. However, I can give you the address of a taxidermist in Montreal—"

THE Englishman closed the colloquy with a sniff of disgust and turned on his heel; but before he had taken his first step toward his own camp I was surprised to hear Syd remark:

"Say, mister, you sure are in hard luck, an' I'd like to help you out." The Britisher faced about. "All this stuff down here belongs to this gentleman," Syd continued, with a jerk of his thumb in my direction; "but I got a bar of my own up the mountain apiece, a pizen fine grizzly, an' he's yours fer a price, ef ye like his looks an' will take him away with you."

"Deah me! You don't say! A grizzly! Now, that would be a little bit of all right, don't ye know. Demned if I don't think I'll—ah—I'll—ah—look him over, anyhow, bah Jove!"

"Syd tipped me a wink; and, quite willing to see the unsportsmanlike sportsman made the victim of one of the merry fellow's practical jokes, I joined the party, and we began the hard ascent through the wet, heavy snow. We were more than half an hour in making the climb to the spot where we had chained the bear the night before. The heat of his huge body had melted a deep hole in the snow, wherein he lay curled up out of sight.

"Here he is!" cried Syd, halting just at the edge of the hole.

"Heah?" repeated the Englishman, as he came up alongside. "Demned if I see him!"

"Look again!" said Syd, throwing a juicy cut of wolf steak at the man's feet, and stepping nimbly to one side. At the same instant the enormous brute rose suddenly on his hind legs, frantically pawing the air as he tugged at his restraining chain, his little red eyes sparkling like live coals, his hot breath turning to jets of vapor as he snorted into the face of his would-be purchaser, who fronted him not five feet away.

WITH a wild shriek of terror at this awful and unexpected apparition, the gaily caparisoned hunter dropped his fancy guncase and fled from the terrible sight straight down the steep side of the mountain.

"Syd and I burst into loud roars of laughter, which were suddenly changed into cries of horror, as with a loud crack the steel chain parted under the terrific strain and we saw the bear spring after the fleeing man with gigantic leaps, dashing past us at a speed that, despite the brute's unwieldy bulk, threatened soon to overtake his affrighted quarry.

"Down, down the sharp decline they sprang, Bruin gaining at every leap. Fear lent wings to the heels of the man, who seemed to skim over the thin crust that had begun to form, while the lumbering yet active form of the bear drove through it like a snowplow, almost obscuring pursuer and pursued in a thick mist of flying flakes.

"With a howl of dismay, Syd grabbed up the abandoned guncase and followed at his top speed, I after him. Once in motion, I began to realize the



"Shot Toward the Valley with the Swiftness of a Falling Star."